

Understanding Dhamma Better in the New Year

This Dhamma lecture was given by Ajahn Buddhādāsa to the monthly Suan Mokkh international retreat participants in Chaiya, on 31 December 1989. Ajahn Buddhādāsa spoke in Thai and Ajahn Ranjuan interpreted into English.

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Western friends who come to join the retreat here at Suan Mokkh, it is a rather appropriate occasion that you all come to join the retreat on this day. As you all know, it is going to be a new year in the next few hours, and so this should be a good opportunity to observe how Thais celebrate our New Year. The celebration of the coming of the New Year concerns people from all walks of life.

When we talk about ‘New Year,’ it should mean a better year than last year. Keep in mind that whenever we think of ‘New Year,’ the first thing to think about is that it must be better than the previous one. **What is the point of celebrating a new year if there will be nothing different from the old one?**

What actually happens is that there is nothing new. For example, people set up a Christmas tree, and families gather and eat turkey. It goes on like this every year. Then what is the point of celebrating the New Year? It just turns out to be the celebration of a ‘new’ repetition every year. So instead of celebrating the coming of the *new* year, let us celebrate the year which will be *better* than the old one, by learning more and doing better than last year. In short, we ought to know more, apply the knowledge learned, and receive better results than last year. Firstly, we should know more than last year. For example, you are learning about *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent co-origination), so you should gain more knowledge on the subject than when you first started. What you will have learned in this new year should be better than what you learned last year.

But let us come back to a basic thing of Buddhism, like the Triple Gem – the very foundation of Buddhism, the Triple Gem. **What you know about the Triple Gem in the New Year has to be better than what you have previously known.** So that is going to be our topic today.

When talking about the Triple Gem, Buddhists would only think of ‘Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha’ – which I have to say is rather ignorant. But if anybody knows just that about the Triple Gem – ‘Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha’ – and they just recite it, I am afraid that that is rather ignorant and not wise to say so.

The Triple Gem does not only belong to Buddhists or Buddhism. It should belong to all people all over the world. ‘Buddha’ is someone who acquires the knowledge which is crucial to solve the problems in the world. ‘Dhamma’ is that crucial knowledge which solves the problems in the world and quenches all suffering. ‘Saṅgha’ are the ones who put such knowledge into practice and are able to solve all problems and quench all sufferings.

Buddha is the one who acquires the indispensable knowledge, and Dhamma is that knowledge. Saṅgha applies such knowledge to eliminate all problems. The world needs all three: knowing what ought to be known, the knowledge, and the ones who apply the knowledge in real life. Any world which lacks these three is in great danger.

Let us emphasize this point again. **The Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, that means the one who knows, the knowledge that ought to be known, and the ones who practice accordingly.** This meaning is very significant to the world. If there is any world and that world does not have these three, it is very unfortunate indeed to have to say that it is a rather crazy world. It is a mad world, a world that knows nothing that is worth knowing. Even though they have so much knowledge, it is not the kind of knowledge that is worthwhile in life.

You must see for yourself that these three are indispensable to the world, as they belong to the world. To think that these three only belong to Buddhism is rather ignorant. If you have not learned about that in this past year, it is okay. It is now a new year and that is something new for you to know. And now that you know, this makes the new year better than the passing one. So you can be content, now that you know something more than before.

The person who knows what the world needs to know can be anyone. He can be the Buddha, Lao Tzu or Jesus Christ, or anyone at all. But he should know what is needed to know in order to solve the problems of the world. Therefore, you can find out for yourself who has that knowledge, who is the kind of person that the world really needs.

Among Buddhists, we consider *paṭiccasamuppāda* – dependent co-origination, which you are going to learn about in the next ten days – to be essential knowledge for a peaceful world. May I ask you to pay extra attention to this matter as something new and better for this new year. **When you learn, you have to put**

what you have learned into practice, which is called ‘Dhamma.’ To solve problems, we apply *paṭiccasamuppāda* to real life through the practice of *ānāpānasati bhāvanā* (mindfulness with breathing). If you practice *ānāpānasati bhāvanā*, then you will be practicing something you have never practiced before. For those who have already started, may your practice improve.

‘Saṅgha’ is the third Gem. This refers to the ones who practice and benefit from doing so. When you have accomplished the practice of *ānāpānasati*, you will have a new life with control over dependent origination. Life will be free from suffering. Life will stop ‘biting itself.’ This is Saṅgha, meaning the ones who are accomplished. May everyone benefit more and more from practicing *ānāpānasati*. Saṅgha does not only refer to monks. Any layperson can be counted as part of the Saṅgha. Saṅgha is a group of people who practice correctly and are able to quench suffering, be they monks or a laypeople.

Buddha knows what the world needs to know. Dhamma is that knowledge. Saṅgha is anyone who puts that knowledge into practice. When the three exist, there will be peace in the world. Please consider this: if no one knows what the world needs to know, no such knowledge exists and no one applies that knowledge, how can the world survive?

There is no need for you to believe what I say. You should be able to see it for yourself. Buddha is the one who acquires what it is that is so crucial to the world. Dhamma is that knowledge. Saṅgha are the ones who put that knowledge into practice. The three belong to the world. They are universal. Thinking that the three belong only to Buddhism is ignorant. Forgive me for using this expression. So the Triple Gem does not belong only to Buddhists. They belong to anybody. And surprisingly, anyone who has the three will automatically become a Buddhist.

Buddhists have no authority to reserve the Triple Gem as their possessions. Anyone who acquires the Triple Gem will be a Buddhist. May the world be filled with persons who know what should be known, with the knowledge that should be known, and with the ones who are accomplished in the practice so that the world is filled with Buddhists. I have to confess that even Thai Buddhists are still ignorant on this matter. They still think that the Triple Gem only belongs to Buddhists, not to the world. The absence of the Triple Gem will eventually put an end to the world. Even Thai Buddhists misunderstand this, and even more so, non-Buddhists. Let us bring this awareness into the world in this new year.

The true Buddhists know very well that Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha – the one who knows, the knowledge that ought to be known, and the ones who practice – **belong to the world** because Lord Buddha himself always said that the

Triple Gem is so meaningful, so significant, and so beneficial to the world, and not only to a particular group at all. If the world can have this Triple Gem, then it will be a world of peace.

Remember – Buddha belongs to the world. Dhamma belongs to the world. Saṅgha belongs to the world. As each one of you belongs to the world, then Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha also belong to you. If you realize this, you will have learned a new thing for this new year. Congratulations.

I challenge anyone to prove that whoever acquires the knowledge which can save the world is Buddha. Any knowledge which helps the world is Dhamma. Any group of people who practice and help the world are Saṅgha. Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha belong to the world. Just remember that Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha belong to the world. I, you, we, are in the world, belong to the world, so it is inevitable that you will have to relate, somehow, to the knowledge and the result of putting that knowledge into practice.

We are sorry that time is up, so the meeting has to end because we are going to offer a teaching to some Thai people on the occasion of the New Year. **We wish all of you success in the retreat and a better new year than the last one.** So the meeting is adjourned. We thank you very much for your kind attention.

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Dhamma lectures given by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu to international retreats participants can be freely listened to from www.suanmokkh.org & www.soundcloud.com/buddhadasa

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